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SUBJECT: A VISIT TO NIGERIA'S EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

REF: ABUJA 2387

1. (SBU) Summary. Embassy Abuja economic officer and military air attach visited the headquarters of Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). This visit occurred following the October and December 2005 crashes of large passenger aircraft near Lagos and in Port Harcourt. NEMA currently cannot operate its sole helicopter at night. The agency is moving toward joint operations with the Nigerian Police. NEMA's national storage facility contains flour, rice, sheet metal, and blankets and tents, but in an emergency, these supplies would not be sufficient for even 1 percent of the population of Abuja, let alone the surrounding region. End summary.

2. (U) Embassy Abuja economic officer and military air attach visited the headquarters of Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in Abuja on December 22, 2005. They met with NEMA Director General Salisu Shuaib "S.S." Makarfi; Air Force Group Captain N.S. Kanwai, NEMA director of search and rescue operations; and Kenneth Nsor, special assistant to Makarfi.

NEMA is learning from its mistakes

3. (SBU) NEMA's mission is to carry out the timely and effective management of emergencies and disasters in Nigeria. This includes collecting information about and disseminating information concerning ethnic and religious clashes occurring within Nigeria. The embassy officers' visit to NEMA occurred in the wake of the October and December 2005 crashes of aircraft, near Lagos and in Port Harcourt, respectively, of Nigeria's Bellview and Sosoliso Airlines. Each crash killed more than 100 persons, and Government of Nigeria (GON) control especially at the Bellview crash site was severely deficient. NEMA Director General Makarfi was defensive about the public and media criticism that NEMA received during the immediate aftermath of the Bellview crash. He said the first responder in such an event should be the local community, not the GON or NEMA. Makarfi also asserted that the flow of information initially should be at and between local entities and the lower levels of government, not at the federal level.

4. (SBU) Search and Rescue Director Kanwai said the GON and NEMA both demonstrated "considerable improvement" in their response to the Sosoliso Airlines crash at Port Harcourt. He acknowledged that intra-government communications during the Bellview crash were "very deficient" and suggested Nigerian agencies should be able to use the Internet to communicate during emergency situations. (Comment: GON offices endure a lack of stable electric power, and they suffer even more severe shortages of computer and Internet terminals. While the GON's actions at and control of the Sosoliso crash site were better than at the Bellview site, the GON's performance at Port Harcourt was not exemplary. The GON also benefited from the Sosoliso crash's having occurred at the edge of Port Harcourt International Airport, rather than out of the city in heavy brush. End comment.)

5. (U) The air attach observed that NEMA did not "attend to" the media at the Bellview crash, which resulted in a slew of inaccurate news stories. Kanwai said NEMA learned from this and that at Port Harcourt, the agency opened a press unit, restricted media access to the crash site, and escorted the media - rather than allowing members of the media to roam freely and broadcast gruesome scenes, as occurred near Lagos. Kanwai also noted that, unlike the Bellview accident, where the crash site remained unsecured, Port Harcourt police maintained a 24-hour vigil until the Sosoliso aircraft's "black box" was located, then handed it over to the appropriate authorities.

No night operations; cooperation with the police

6. (U) Kanwai said NEMA has one Mi-17 helicopter and hopes to obtain four more in 2006. This Mi-17 is housed and maintained in Kaduna, several hours north of Abuja. This helicopter is flown and manned by the Nigerian Air Force for

use in search and rescue and disaster management. After the air attach noted that NEMA's helicopter currently operates only during daylight hours, and that a 15-hour response time is not acceptable, she urged that these Air Force pilots pursue night-flying qualifications. Kanwai acknowledged the need for NEMA to gain a nighttime capability for its helicopter, which is equipped for night flying.

17. (U) Makarfi noted that NEMA is "moving toward" 24-hour joint operations with the Nigerian Police. Zanna said senior police officials are committed to cooperation in disaster management, as is the national police inspector general (commander). Zanna said that while commitment by the police exists, they need training in and funding for logistics (primarily vehicles), protective clothing, and especially for improved, integrated communications. Zanna said there is a need for joint training with the Nigerian Police because the police are the first responders, and because of the need to protect an accident scene or crime scene.

18. (U) Zanna observed that in Nigeria, deploying the Army legally is highly complicated and cannot be carried out quickly. Kanwai agreed and asserted that in terms of disaster management, there are too many layers of approval required to make a military deployment within Nigeria practical. He said this makes NEMA's cooperation with the Nigerian Police that much more necessary. The air attach explained that because of U.S. Government (USG) human-rights concerns over possible American military training of Nigerians, it is easier for the USG to give disaster-management equipment to NEMA than to the Nigerian military.

UK disaster-management training at Jaji

19. (U) Zanna discussed the UK-funded training, now in the fourth of five years, under way at Nigeria's Command and Staff College in Jaji. This training seeks to build up Nigeria's capacity in emergency and disaster management, for mid-level to senior-level planners working for national-level entities. The program is now starting to enroll state-level officials as well. Zanna described this training as too general in nature, rather than being specific to Nigeria and its six geopolitical zones. He said the course is really for Nigerian managers, who will then tailor what they have learned for those officials serving below them, but that the current training is not for "hands-on" employees. Kanwai added the course's curriculum must be translated into Nigeria's three predominant local languages, to make it more applicable and relevant.

10. (SBU) Zanna said that despite fears the training may cease in 2007 because of a lack of funding, the United Kingdom likely will extend funding for this training, in part so officials of other West African states may enroll in the course. (Comment: The first year of this training accomplished little. This was largely because Nigerian officials originally exhibited considerable suspicion over the United Kingdom's motives in offering this training. Nigerian course participants now value the training highly, and the UK trainers are complimentary about their NEMA student's enthusiasm and professionalism. End comment.)

NEMA's Mission-Control Center

11. (U) NEMA's facilities include the agency's Mission-Control Center, which was completed in 2003. Its main feature is Nigeria's COSPAS-SARSAT (Space System for the Search of Vessels in Distress/Search and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking) system, built by Techno-Sciences, Inc., of Lanham, Maryland. This system, which uses satellites in low-earth and geostationary orbits, aids maritime and aviation safety in and off the coast of Nigeria. It is designed to detect and locate mariners, aviators, and land-based users in distress.

Disaster-relief stockpiles are lacking

12. (SBU) NEMA has outside its Abuja headquarters its national storage facility, which is composed of three small, non-refrigerated warehouses, which altogether were half empty. These warehouses contained flour, rice, sheet metal for roofing, and blankets and tents, and had a large supply of timber outside. (Comment: These supplies could not provide for even 1 percent of the population of Abuja, let alone the surrounding region. Should an emergency in or near Abuja affect more than several thousand persons, Nigeria will need international assistance to contend with the disaster. End comment.) NEMA's equipment stored outside its warehouses included two towed generators with erectable lights, one towed water purifier, and three mobile medical clinics. All of this equipment was stored uncovered in the open, and one mobile medical clinic that the economic

officer and air attach toured was ruinously hot inside.

Comment

13. (U) Nigeria currently has six zonal offices for disaster management: northwest zonal office, Kaduna; northeast zonal office, Maiduguri; central zonal office, Jos; southwest zonal office, Lagos; southeast zonal office, Enugu; and the south-south zonal office, Port Harcourt. The country eventually will have 36 disaster units, organized on a geographical basis and corresponding to Nigeria's 36 states.

14. (U) The NEMA officials gave the economic officer and air attach copies of the most recent version (2001) of Nigeria's "National Disaster Response Plan" (NDRP). NEMA, which prepared the plan, notes in it that prior to the agency's establishment in 1999, Nigeria's "response e personnel were as hapless as the victims." NEMA also writes in its NRDP that large portions of the manual were adopted from U.S. disaster-management publications. While portions of the NRDP appear well thought out, it also includes a list of government hospitals across Nigeria "to which disaster casualties may be taken in the first instance" - but includes telephone numbers for almost none of these hospitals.

15. (SBU) In her discussions with NEMA officials, the embassy's air attach explained that to achieve consistent improvement in NEMA employees' crisis-management skills, the same cadre of personnel must receive recurring training for six to eight years. Such sustained effort, however, will be a challenge to the NEMA and other Nigerian agencies with a role in disaster management, because of GON agencies' generally deficient professionalism, infrastructure, and funding. NEMA also is at the mercy of bureaucratic deficiencies within the GON and especially within Nigeria's severely flawed air transportation sector.

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